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(72) Inventor: Broskow, James A.
Buffalo Grove, Illinois 60089 (US)

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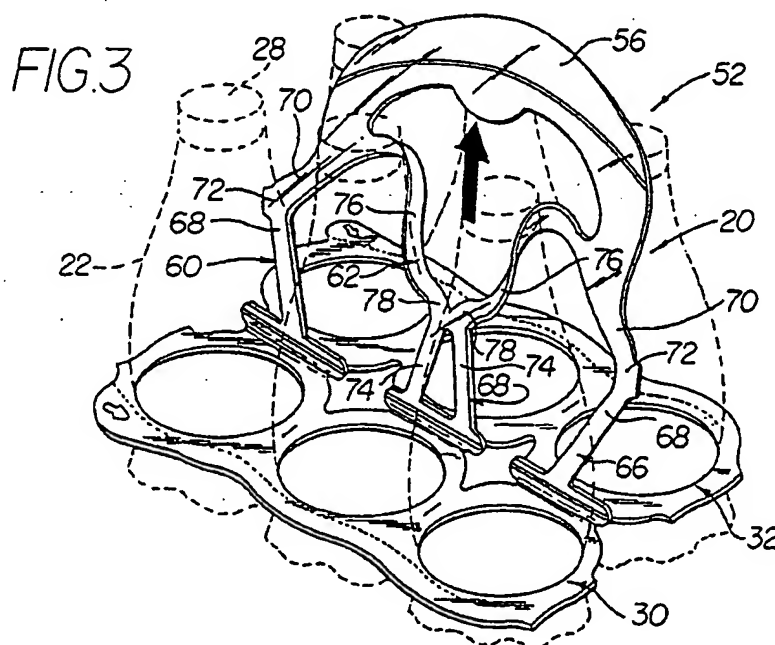
(74) Representative: Rackham, Stephen Neil
GILL JENNINGS & EVERY,
Broadgate House,
7 Eldon Street
London EC2M 7LH (GB)

(71) Applicant: ILLINOIS TOOL WORKS INC.
Glenview, Illinois 60025 (US)

(54) Container package

(57) A container package includes a plastic carrier (20) carrying a plurality of containers (22), such as bottles or cans. The carrier (20) includes a handle portion (52) which, at rest, does not substantially extend above the tops (28) of the containers (22), but permits the handle portion (52) to expand upwardly to extend beyond the tops (28) of the containers for carrying them. The carrier (20) includes container engaging portions (30, 32), each of which includes bands (34) which define apertures therein for engaging the side walls (24) of the

containers (22) to hold the containers (22) therein to form a package. The handle portion (52) extends generally perpendicular to the container engaging portions (30, 32) when the carrier is applied to the containers (22). The handle portion (52) has strap portions (60, 62, 64, 66) which generally straighten when the handle portion (52) is expanded. A perforation line (80) may be included in the handle portion (52) to separate the strap portions from each other to allow them to straighten further when the package is lifted by its handle.



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Description

This invention relates to a package which includes a carrier and containers, such as bottles or the like.

Currently, several types of carriers can be found in the art for securing containers together into a package. One example is a typical six-pack carrier which is formed from a flat sheet of plastic material and is used to carry a plurality of cans. A plurality of apertures are provided, usually in two rows, in the sheet and each aperture holds a can therein. The carrier is secured to the top of each can so that the carrier is positioned slightly below the plane defined by the tops of the cans. The carrier includes finger holes therethrough between the rows so that a consumer can insert his or her fingers therethrough to carry the package.

When the package is formed in this manner, a consumer can easily place his or her fingers through the finger holes and carry the package. When this type of carrier is positioned on containers, such as bottles or the like, at a position along the side wall of the containers, however, the package cannot be easily carried in this manner. A consumer must insert his or her hand down into the package to access the finger holes. If the persons' hand is too large to fit between the rows of containers, the person may not be able to access the finger holes.

Handles have been added to carriers in this type of packaging so that the consumer does not have to insert his or her hand into the package to the level of the carrier. The handle extends upwardly in the package and generally perpendicular to the flat carrier with the top of the handle being generally flush with the tops of the containers.

One example of such a carrier and the resulting package is disclosed in EP-A-0678456. One problem that arises with this type of carrier is that the consumers' hand must still be inserted into the package to grasp the handle whilst it is being carried. A further refinement of this carrier is described in European Patent Application No.96300996.4 published as EP-A-

According to the first aspect of this invention a package comprises a plastic carrier and a plurality of containers, each container having a side wall and a top, said carrier comprising container engaging portions, each container engaging portion comprises bands defining apertures, said bands engaging the side walls of the containers to hold the containers therein, a handle portion extending generally perpendicular to said container engaging portions said handle portion having an uppermost surface which does not substantially extend above the tops of the containers when said package is not being carried, said handle portion having strap portions with elbows, said strap portions being sufficiently resilient in relation to the weight of the package that they generally straighten to allow said handle portion to expand upwardly so that a grip portion of said handle extends beyond the tops of the containers when said pack-

age is being carried.

According to a second aspect of this invention a carrier for carrying a plurality of containers, each container having a side wall and a top, said carrier comprises container engaging portions, each container engaging portion comprises bands defining apertures for holding the containers therein along the side wall of each container to form a package, a handle portion extending generally perpendicular to said container engaging portions when said carrier is applied to containers, said handle portion including strap portions formed from a flexible plastics material with elbows and having an uppermost surface which does not substantially extend above the tops of the containers when the package is not being carried; when said package is being carried by a grip portion said strap portions generally straighten to allow handle portion to expand upwardly so that the grip portion extends beyond the tops of the containers.

The handle portion of the carrier is preferably formed from a generally U-shaped grip portion and a plurality of angled or bent strap portions which integrally connect the grip portion of the handle portion to the container engaging portion. When the carrier is lifted by a consumer so that the package can be carried, the strap portions generally straighten and permit the handle portion to expand upwardly so that the grip portion of handle portion extends beyond the tops of the containers.

The handle portion in one embodiment is formed from two sets of straps which are connected to each other along a perforation line. When the package is carried by a consumer, the first and second sets of straps split apart from each other along the perforation line and generally straighten to permit the handle portion to expand upwardly so that the grip portion of the handle portion extends beyond the tops of the containers.

The outermost extents of the handle portion and the container engaging portions provide attachment regions by which adjacent carriers are interconnected. This allows a plurality of flat carriers to be easily handled. When the carriers are flat and are attached to each other, the carriers can be wound onto a reel or otherwise easily handled.

Preferred embodiments of packages in accordance with this invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals identify like elements, and in which:

Figure 1 is a side elevational view of a carrier which incorporates the features of a first embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the carrier of Figure 1 shown surrounding a plurality of containers, shown in phantom lines, to form a package with a handle portion of the carrier at an at rest position;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of the carrier of Figure 1 shown surrounding a plurality of containers, shown in phantom lines, to form a package with a handle portion of the carrier at a carrying position;

Figure 4 is a partial elevational view of a plurality of flat carriers embodying features of the present invention and which are connected together;

Figure 5 is a side elevational view of a carrier which incorporates the features of a second embodiment of the invention;

Figure 6 is a perspective view of the carrier of Figure 5 shown surrounding a plurality of containers, shown in phantom lines, to form a package with a handle portion of the carrier at an at rest position; and

Figure 7 is a perspective view of the carrier of Figure 5 shown surrounding a plurality of containers, shown in phantom lines, to form a package with a handle portion of the carrier at a carrying position.

As shown in the drawings, a package including a carrier device 20, 20a, is shown holding a plurality of containers 22. A first embodiment of the carrier 20 is shown in Figures 1-4 and a second embodiment of the carrier 20a is shown in Figures 5-7. Like elements in each embodiment are denoted by like reference numerals with the like elements of the second embodiment having the suffix "a" thereafter.

As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the first embodiment of the carrier device 20, is used to hold and carry six bottles 22 to form a package 23. As shown in Figures 6 and 7, the second embodiment of the carrier device 20a, is used to hold and carry eight bottles 22 to form a package 23a. Each bottle 22 includes a side wall 24, a bottom wall 26 and a top or cap 28. It is to be understood that other types of containers can be carried by the carrier 20, 20a, such as cans and the like.

Each carrier 20, 20a is made of a suitable flexible, resilient, stretchable material, such as plastic. Preferably, the carrier 20, 20a is made of a low density polyethylene so that the carrier 20, 20a can be stretched over the containers 22 and conform to the side walls 24 of the containers 22. The carrier 20, 20a may be applied to the containers 22 by known means, for example, by the machines disclosed in United States Patent No. 4,250,682 to Braun or United States Patent No. 3,204,386 to Creed et al.

When the containers 22 are secured in a package arrangement by the carrier 20, 20a, the containers 22 are aligned in an array so to form two rows. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, in the first embodiment of the carrier 20, each row has three bottles 22, and as shown in Figure 3, in the second embodiment of the carrier 20a, each row has four bottles 22. It is to be understood that the carriers 20, 20a operates equally well with any number of containers 22. Directing attention to the general structure of the embodiments of the carrier 20, 20a, the general structure is described with respect to the first embodiment of the carrier 20 for convenience in explanation. The second embodiment of the carrier 20a has a like structure except for the differences noted herein.

The carrier 20 includes container engaging portions

30, 32, each formed from a plurality of annular rings or bands 34. Each band 34 has an inner margin 36, an outer margin 38 and side margins 40, 42 which connect the inner margin 36 of each band 34 to the outer margin 38 of the same band 34. The side margins 40, 42 of adjacent bands 34 are integrally joined together so that the outer margins 38 of the bands 34 are continuous and uninterrupted along the length of the carrier 20.

The bands 34 are connected or joined together by a seam or a joined portion 44, as described herein, along the inner margins 36 of each band 34. The annular bands 34 define a plurality of shaped apertures 46 for securely holding the containers 22 therein. The outer margin 48 of each aperture 46 is slightly contoured for reasons described herein.

The container engaging portions 30, 32 freely extend from the joined portion 44. When the carrier 20 is not assembled with containers 22, the carrier 20 is flat and the joined portion lies in the same plane as the container engaging portions 30, 32. The joined portion 44 projects generally perpendicular to the plane of the container engaging portions 30, 32 when the carrier 20 is assembled with containers 22.

The joined portion 44 is formed by extruding a strip or layer of resilient, stretchable material (not shown), such as plastic, preferably low density polyethylene material, between the inner margins 36 of each annular band 34 and thereafter sufficiently melting and merging the inner margins 36 of the container engaging portions 22, 24 and the layer of extruded plastic together by known means, preferably by heat sealing and fusing the layers together, to form a strong, integral bond. The joined portion 44 is interrupted along its length by cut-outs 50 which form apertures between the container engaging portions 30, 32. A method for forming the multi-package device or carrier device 20 of the present invention is disclosed in EP-A-0678456.

Preferably, the carrier 20 is formed by joining two separate sheets of plastic material together at the joined portion 44. However, it is within the scope of the invention that a single sheet of plastic material may be used to form the carrier 20 by folding the sheet in half and applying a layer of plastic or otherwise fusing the sheets together to form the joined portion 44.

The carrier 20 includes an integral handle portion 52 which extends upwardly from the joined portion 44 of the carrier 20. Thus, when the carrier 20 is not assembled with containers 22, the carrier 20 is flat and the handle portion 52 lies in the same plane as the container engaging portions 30, 32. When the carrier 20 is assembled with containers 22, the handle portion 52 projects generally perpendicular to the plane of the container engaging portions 30, 32.

The handle portion 52 is formed from the two sheets that are used to form the carrier 20. A bond 54, formed by heat sealing the sheets together or by extruding a layer of plastic material between the sheets, is provided along an upper portion of the handle portion 52 to pre-

vent the sheets which form the handle portion 52 from separating. This also aids in making the handle portion 52 easy to grasp by a consumer.

Now directing attention to the specifics of the first embodiment of the carrier 20, shown in Figures 1-4, and which is preferably used to carry six containers 22, the handle portion 52 is formed from a generally U-shaped grip portion 56, which a consumer grasps with his or her hand to carry the package 23, and a plurality of angled or bent strap portions 58 which integrally connect the grip portion 56 of the handle portion 52 to the joined portion 44. The carrier 20 has a first set of straps which is formed from an outer strap portion 60 and an inner strap portion 62 and a second set of straps which is formed from an outer strap portion 64 and an inner strap portion 66. Both sets of strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 are formed from both sheets of the handle portion 52. The sets of straps 60, 62; 64, 66 are integrally connected together as described herein. The U-shaped grip portion 56 is connected to the bent strap portions at a location 57 which can vary depending on the desired height of the handle when elevated or expanded in accordance with this invention.

When the carrier 20 is attached to containers 22 and when the package 23 is not being carried by a consumer, the handle portion 52 is at the "at rest" position and the grip portion 56 of the handle portion 52 does not substantially extend above the tops 28 of the containers 22 as shown in Figure 2. The strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 permit the handle portion 52 to expand upwardly so that the grip portion 56 of the handle portion 52 extends beyond the tops 28 of the containers 22 for carrying purposes, as shown in Figure 3 and as described herein.

The outer strap portions 60, 64 each have a first leg 68 which extends upwardly from the joined portion 44 above the outermost aperture of the carrier 20, respectively, at angle α relative to the joined portion 44 and each of which diverge outwardly from each other. Each first leg 68 is integral with the joined portion 44. Each outer strap portion 60, 64 has a second leg 70 which is integral with and disposed at an angle α' relative to the first leg 68 and joined to the first leg 68 at an elbow portion 72. The second leg 70 is integral with the grip portion 56. At rest, the second leg 70 is generally parallel to the joined portion 44.

The inner strap portions 62, 66 each have a first leg 74 which extends upwardly from the joined portion 44 above the centre aperture of the carrier 20 at an angle relative to the joined portion 44 and each of which converge inwardly towards each other. The first leg 74 is integral with the joined portion 44. The inner strap portions 62, 66 have a second leg 76 which is integral with and disposed at an angle α relative to the first leg 74 and joined to the first leg 74 at an elbow portion 78. The second leg 76 is integral with the grip portion 56. At rest, the second leg 76 is parallel to the joined portion 44.

The elbow portions 78 of the inner strap portions 62, 66 are integrally joined together. Thus, the handle

portion 52 is integrally formed.

In the preferred embodiment, α and α' are congruent and 50° , while β and β' are congruent and 80° . These angles should be acute but the exact angle can be varied depending on the extent of elevation desired and/or the amount of relative stress on the various straps desired. Also, the location of connection points 57 to the bent strap portions will determine the actual angles.

The junctions between the grip portion 56 and the legs 70, 76 are located so as to be spaced from the elbows 72, 78 to promote flexing of the legs and upward extension of the grip portion as described below. In other words, the strap portions 60, 62, 64, 66 extend in a zig-zag fashion from their junctions with the joined portion 44 to their junctions with the grip portions 56 for enabling the strap portions to straighten out when the package is lifted by the handle.

When a consumer desires to carry the package 23 by the handle portion 52, the consumer grasps the grip portion 56 of the handle portion 52. As the package 23 is lifted by the consumer, the sets of straps 60, 62; 64, 66 flex due to the handle portion 52 being pulled upwardly and the weight of the containers 22 counteracting the upward force. The handle portion 52 flexes and the strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 generally straighten, as shown in Figure 3, so that the handle portion 52 expands upwardly which causes the grip portion 56 of the handle portion 52 to extend beyond the tops 28 of the containers 22. The extent to which the handle portion 52 flexes and the strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 straighten will depend upon the total weight of the package, the resiliency of the strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 and legs 70, and to the angle of the elbows 72, 78. When the strap portions 60, 62; 64, 66 generally straighten, the first and second legs 68, 70; 74, 76 of each strap portion 60, 62; 64, 66, respectively, generally form a straight line. Due to the elbow portions 72, 78, the first and second legs 68, 70; 74, 76 do not completely straighten. When the handle portion 52 of the package 23 is released, the handle portion 52 generally reassumes its initial shape.

Now directing attention to the specifics of the second embodiment of the carrier 20a, shown in Figures 5-7, and which is preferably used to carry eight containers 22, the handle portion 52a is similar to that of the first embodiment. The handle portion 52a is formed from a generally U-shaped grip portion 56a which a consumer grasps by his or her hand to carry the package 23 and a plurality of angled or bent strap portions 58a which integrally connect the grip portion 56a of the handle portion 52a to the joined portion 44. The U-shaped grip portion 56a is connected to the bent strap portions at a location 57a which can vary depending on the desired height of the handle when elevated or expanded in accordance with this invention. Each strap portion 58a is formed from both sheets of the handle portion 52a.

The carrier 20a has a first set of straps which is formed from an outer strap portion 60a and an inner strap portion 62a and a second set of straps which is

formed from an outer strap portion 64a and an inner strap portion 66a. The first and second sets of straps 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a are connected to each other along a perforation line 80 as described herein.

Like that of the first embodiment and as shown in Figure 6, when the carrier 20a is attached to containers 22 and when the package 23a is not being carried by a consumer, the handle portion 52a is at the "at rest" position and the grip portion 56a of the handle portion 52a does not substantially extend above the tops 28 of the containers 22. When the package 23a is lifted by a consumer, the handle portion 52a stretches and the perforation line 80 tears. This splits the first and second sets of straps 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a apart from each other so that the strap portions 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a can generally straighten to permit the handle portion 52a to expand upwardly so that the grip portion 56a of the handle portion 52a can extend beyond the tops 28 of the containers 22, as shown in Figure 7 and as described herein.

The outer strap portions 60a, 64a each have a first leg 68a which extends upwardly from the joined portion 44 above the outermost apertures of the carrier 20a, respectively, at angle λ relative to the joined portion 44 and diverge away from each other. Each first leg 68a is integral with the joined portion 44. The outer strap portions 60a, 64a each have a second leg 70a which is integral with and disposed at an angle ϕ' relative to the first leg 68a and joined to the first leg 68a at an elbow portion 72a. The second leg 70a is integral with the grip portion 56a. At rest, the second leg 70a is parallel to the joined portion 44.

The inner strap portions 62a, 66a each have a first leg 74a which extends upwardly from the joined portion 44 above the innermost apertures of the carrier 20a at an angle ϕ relative to the joined portion 44 and converge inwardly towards each other. The inner strap portions 62a, 66a each have a second leg 76a which is integral with and disposed at an angle ϕ' relative to the first leg 74a and joined to the first leg 74a at an elbow portion 78a. At rest, the second leg 76a is parallel to the joined portion 44. The elbow portions 72a, 78a of the inner strap portions 62a, 66a are joined together along the perforation line 80.

In the preferred embodiment, λ and λ' are congruent and 66° , while ϕ and ϕ' are congruent and 55° . These angles should be acute but the exact angle can be varied depending on the extent of elevation desired and/or the amount of relative stress on the various straps desired. Also, the location of connection points 57a to the bent strap portions will determine the actual angles.

The junctions between the grip portion 56 and the legs 70a, 76a are located so as to be spaced from the elbows 72a, 78a to promote flexing of the legs and Upward extension of the grip portion 56a as described below. In other words, the strap portions 60a, 62a, 64a, 66a extend in a zig-zag fashion from their junctions with the joined portion 44 to their junctions with the grip portions 56a for enabling the strap portions to straighten

out when the package is lifted by the handle.

When a consumer desires to carry the package 23a by the handle portion 52a, the consumer grasps the grip portion 56a of the handle portion 52a. As the package 23a is lifted by the consumer, the sets of straps 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a flex due to the handle portion 52a being pulled upwardly and the weight of the containers 22 counteracting the upward force. The handle portion 52a splits along the perforation line 80 to separate the sets of straps and the strap portions 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a of the handle portion 52a generally straighten, as shown in Figure 7, so that the handle portion 52a expands upwardly causing the grip portion 56a of the handle portion 52a to extend beyond the tops 28 of the containers 22. When the strap portions 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a generally straighten, the first and second legs 68a, 70a; 74a, 76a of each strap portion 60a, 62a; 64a, 66a generally form a straight line. Due to the elbow portions 72a, 78a, the first and second legs 68a, 70a; 74a, 76a do not completely straighten. When the handle portion 52a of the package 23a is released, the handle portion 52a generally reassumes its initial shape.

As shown in Figure 4, when the carriers 20 are manufactured, the carriers 20 are integrally attached together before being separated into individual carriers. The outermost ends 82 of the handle portion 52 and the outermost ends 84 of the container engaging portions 30, 32 provide attachment regions for attaching adjacent interconnected like carriers thereto as shown in Figure 4. This allows a plurality of flat carriers 20 to be easily handled. When the carriers 20 are flat and are attached to each other, the carriers 20 can be wound onto a reel into z roll or otherwise easily handled. To form an individual carrier 20, the carriers are cut apart from each other by suitable means. The embodiment of the carrier 20a shown in Figures 5-7 includes attachment regions 82, 84 like that of the carrier 20 shown in the first embodiment and can be handled in the same manner.

Each carrier device 20, 20a can include tear strips 86, 86a. Each tear strip 86, 86a is formed from a substantial portion of the continuous outer margins 38 of the bands 34 and is separated from the remainder of the carrier device 20, 20a by a fine, linear perforation line 88, which, when torn, separates the outer margins 38 of the carrier device 20, 20a into a first portion, which is formed from the remaining portion of the outer margin of the carrier and a second portion, which is formed from the tear strip 86, 86a itself. The strips 86, 86a, once separated from the remainder of the carrier 20, 20a, allow the containers 22 to be easily and quickly released from the carrier 20, 20a.

The perforation line 88 which separates the tear strip 86, 86a from the first portion may be formed from a series of spaced dots, or alternatively, a series of spaced short lines. Each dot in the perforation line 88 is separated from each other by a continuous, uninterrupted portion of the carrier 20, 20a. The perforation lines 88 do not significantly reduce package integrity while fa-

cilitating tearing and removal of the tear strips 86, 86a on each side of the carrier device 20, 20a. It is envisioned that an extruded bead of material could be used instead of the perforation line. The perforation line 88 is formed by suitable known means.

Each perforation line 88 starts at an end of the carrier device 20, 20a and preferably ends within the perimeter of the carrier device 20, 20a at a position which is spaced inwardly from the end margin of the last aperture on each side of the carrier device 20 so that the strip 86, 86a is integrally joined with the remaining portion of the carrier device 20, 20a. The tear strips 86, 86a can both start at the same end of the carrier device 20, 20a. Alternatively, the tear strips 86, 86a can start at opposite ends of the carrier device 20, 20a. When each strip 86, 86a is torn along its perforation line 88, the strip 86, 86a remains attached to the carrier device 20, 20a and does not separate into a distinct, discardable device from the remainder of the carrier device 20, 20a.

The perforation lines 88 allow a consumer to tear the tear strips 86, 86a to separate the strips 86, 86a from its associated first portion. Once each strip 86, 86a is separated from its associated first portion, a very narrow, continuous web of material, which is forced from the first portion, remains and is not torn or ruptured by the tearing of the strip 86, 86a. The containers 22 are retained in the package array by the narrow web so as to not separate from each other. The narrow, continuous web prevents the containers 22 from becoming dislodged uncontrollably when the consumer wants to open the package 23, 23a. The tearing action of the strip 86, 86a from the remaining portion of the carrier device 20, 20a may form a jagged edge along the length of the web. Preferably, the width of the first portion, which later forms the narrow web after the tear strip 86, 86a is torn, is greater than the distance between two adjacent dots or lines in the perforation line 88, so that the strip 86, 86a may be removed with a minimal chance of the forces of removing the strip 86, 86a being directed into the apertures 46 of the carrier device 20, 20a prematurely.

To release the containers 22 from the carrier device 20, 20a, the narrow web is selectively ruptured. Since the carrier device 20, 20a is positioned along the side walls 24 of each of the bottles 22, the web may be selectively and easily ruptured through a leveraging of the bottles 22 against adjacent bottles 22 to break the remaining narrow web which holds the bottles 22 together in the package array.

Since the outer margins 48 of the apertures 46 in the carrier device 20, 20a are slightly contoured and each tear strip 86, 86a is linear, this creates a region of specific reduced width of the remaining web, and therefore a stress concentration and weakness to facilitate the easy rupturing of the web and removal of the containers 22 thereafter. Furthermore, since each perforation line 88 ends at a position which is spaced inwardly from the end margin of the last aperture 46, depending on the amount of force used to tear the strip 86, 86a, the

final forces of the tearing of the strip 86, 86a may be directed inwardly into the aperture 46 which releases the container 22 in that aperture 46 while retaining the containers in all other apertures.

As shown in the drawings, each tear strip 86, 86a may include an enlarged portion 90, 90a at its starting end with an aperture 92, 92a, shown as an arrow-shape, therein. To tear the strip 86, 86a, the consumer grasps the enlarged portion 90, 90a of the strip 86, 86a and may piece a finger through the aperture 92, 92a in the enlarged portion 90, 90a to facilitate gripping of the tear strip 86, 86a so that the strip 86, 86a can be easily torn.

The carrier devices 20, 20a of the present invention presents several other advantages. For example, the carrier devices 20, 20a are sturdy while allowing a consumer to easily carry the package 23, 23a. The carrier devices 20, 20a of the present invention can be manufactured at a low cost.

Claims

1. A package comprising:
 - a plastic carrier (20) and a plurality of containers (22), each container (22) having a side wall (24) and a top (28), said carrier (20) comprising container engaging portions (30,32), each container engaging portion comprising bands (34) defining apertures, said bands (34) engaging the side walls (24) of the containers (22) to hold the containers (22) therein, a handle portion (52) extending generally perpendicular to said container engaging portions (30,32) said handle portion (52) having an uppermost surface which does not substantially extend above the tops (28) of the containers (22) when said package is not being carried, said handle portion (52) having strap portions (60,62,64,66) with elbows (72,78), said strap portions being sufficiently resilient in relation to the weight of the package that they generally straighten to allow said handle portion (52) to expand upwardly so that a grip portion (56) of said handle extends beyond the tops (28) of the containers (22) when said package is being carried.
2. A package as defined in claim 1, wherein said handle portion (52) further includes separating means (80) between said strap portions (78) for separating said strap portions (78) from one another as the package is lifted by its grip portion (56) as the handle portion (52) expands upwardly to extend beyond the tops (28) of the containers (22).
3. A package as defined in claim 2, wherein said separating means is a perforation line (80).
4. a package as defined in any preceding claim, which includes six or eight containers.

5. A carrier (20) for carrying a plurality of containers (22), each container having a side wall (24) and a top (28), said carrier (20) comprising: container engaging portions (30,32), each container engaging portion (30,32) comprising bands (34) defining apertures for holding the containers (22) therein along the side wall (24) of each container (22) to form a package, a handle portion (52) extending generally perpendicular to said container engaging portions (30,32) when said carrier (20) is applied to containers (22), said handle portion (52) including strap portions (60,62,64,68) formed from a flexible plastics material with elbows (72,78) and having an uppermost surface which does not substantially extend above the tops (28) of the containers (22) when the package is not being carried; when said package is being carried by a grip portion (56) said strap portions (60,62,64,68) generally straighten to allow handle portion (52) to expand upwardly so that the grip portion (56) extends beyond the tops (28) of the containers (22).

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6. A carrier as defined in claim 5, wherein said handle portion (52) further includes separating means (80) between said strap portions (60,62,64,68) for allowing said strap portions to separate so that they can generally straighten when said grip portion (56) of the handle portion (52) is expanded upwardly to extend beyond the tops (28) of the containers (22).

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7. A carrier as defined in claim 6, wherein said container engaging portions (30,32) are configured to contain eight containers (22).
8. A carrier as defined in claim 5, 6 or 7, wherein said strap portions have attachment regions (82) by which they are attached to an adjacent carrier.

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9. A carrier as defined in claim 5, 6, 7 or 8, wherein said container engaging portions have attachment regions (84) by which they are attached to an adjacent carrier.

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10. A flexible plastic carrier (20) for carrying a plurality of containers (22) each of which has a sidewall (24) and a top (28), said carrier (20) comprising container engaging portions (30,32) including bands (34) defining apertures for holding containers (22) therein along the sidewall (24) of each container (22) to form a package, a handle portion (52) extending generally upwardly from said container engaging portion (30,32) when the carrier (20) is applied to the containers (22), said handle portion (52) including a grip portion (56) and a flexible zig-zag strap portion extending between said container engaging portions (30,32) and said grip portion (56) and separating means (80) located between adjacent zig-zag portions and separating on lifting the grip portion (56) to thereby enable the grip portion (56) to extend above the tops (28) of the containers (22) when the package is picked up by the grip portion (56).

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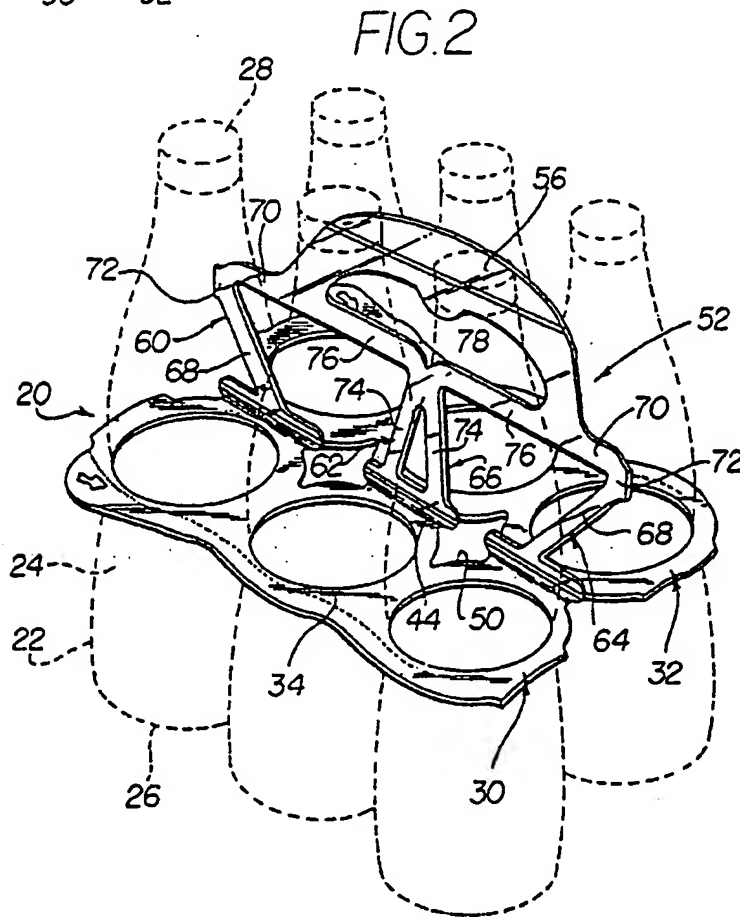
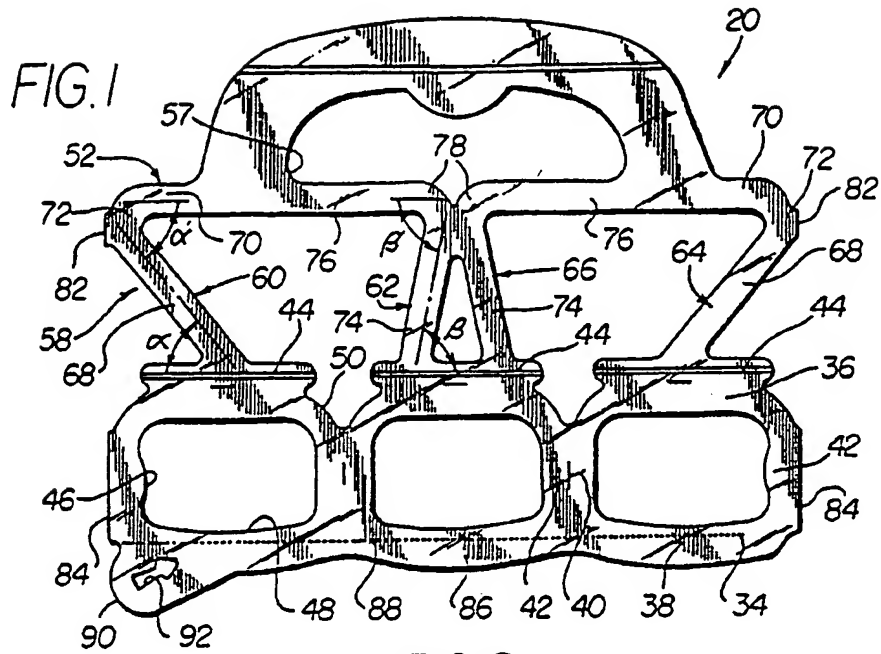


FIG.3

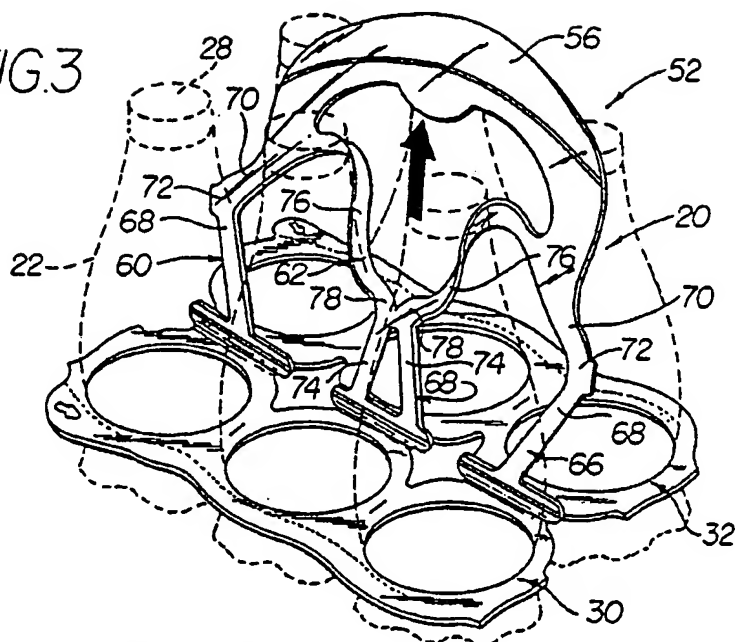


FIG. 4

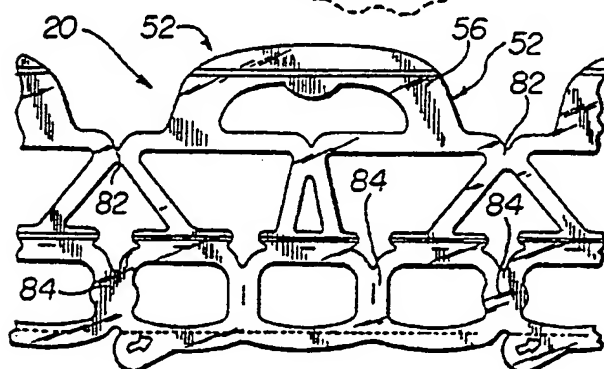


FIG.5

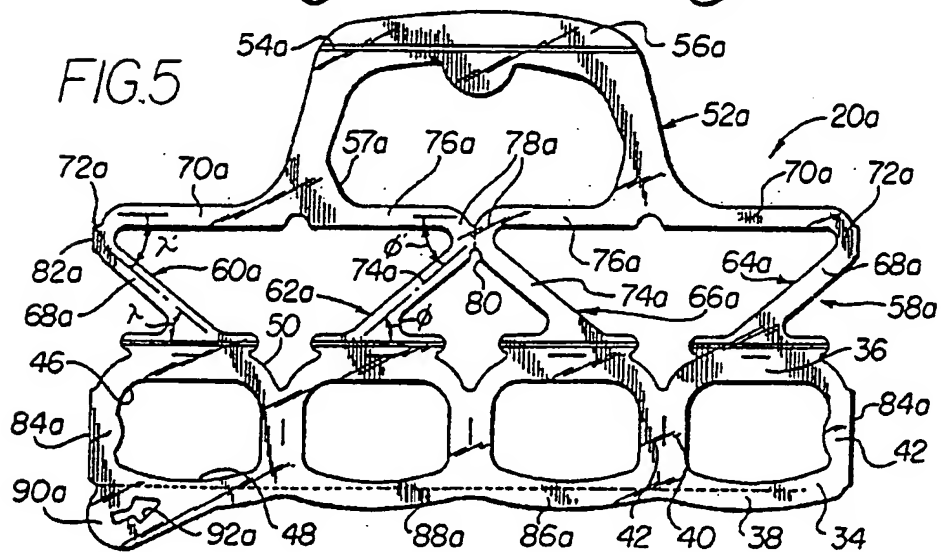


FIG.6

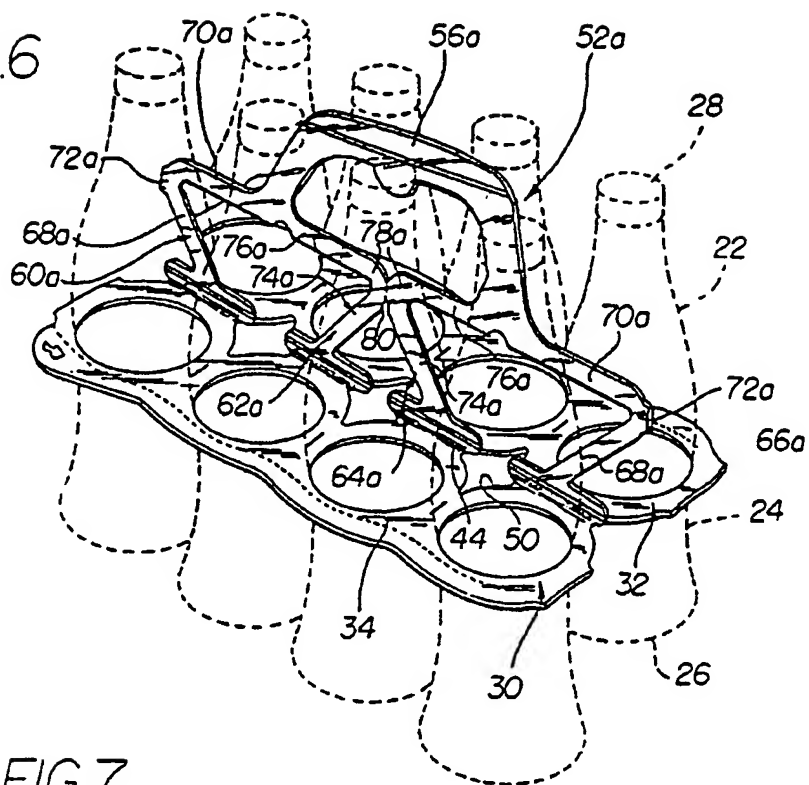
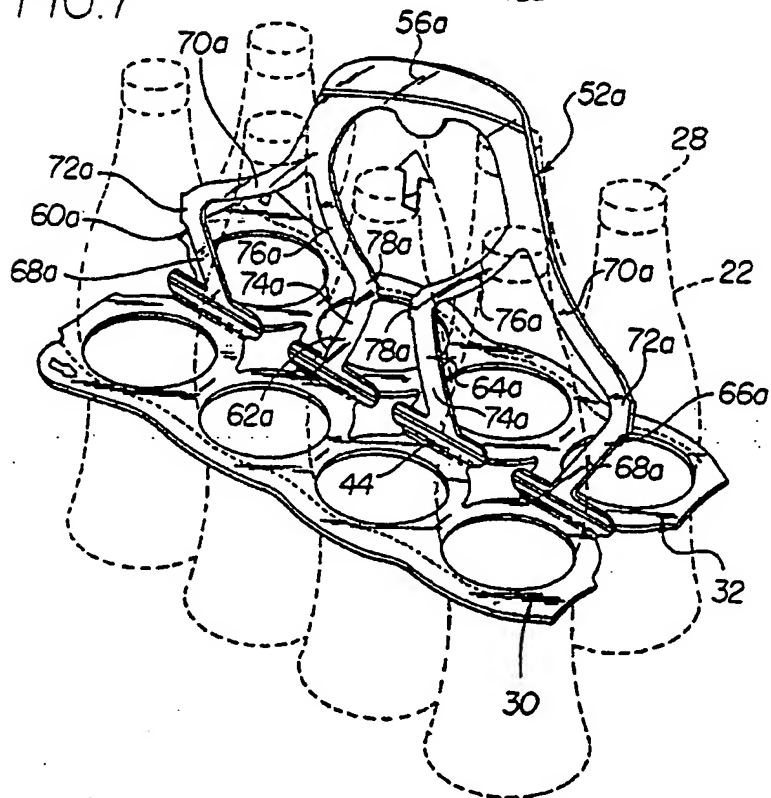


FIG.7





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 96 30 4051

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	EP-A-0 453 122 (SCYPHER CORP) 23 October 1991	1-3,5,6,10	B65D71/50
Y	* column 3, line 48 - column 6, line 52; figures 1,2 *	4	
Y	DE-A-20 35 736 (ILLINOIS TOOL WORKS INC) 11 March 1971 * page 4, last paragraph - page 6, paragraph 2; figures *	4	
Y	US-A-4 850 479 (BIRD STANFORD W) 25 July 1989 * column 2, line 23 - line 59; figures *	4	
P,A, D	EP-A-0 678 456 (ILLINOIS TOOL WORKS) 25 October 1995 * the whole document *	1-10	
A	DE-A-14 57 487 (ILLINOIS TOOL WORKS INC) * page 6, last paragraph - page 8, paragraph 1; figures *	1-10	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
			B65D
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 9 September 1996	Examiner Olsson, B
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application I : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

EP 0 748 744 A1 (PCT/US95/00000)